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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are offered on the technique of establishing understanding between pupil, teacher, and parent by formal and informal conferences. Means of establishing goals for individual students are suggested, and methods of evaluating performance are given. The importance of communication between parent and teacher by means of conferences and written notes is stressed. Samples of "commitment sheets" for elementary grade pupils, delineating what tasks are to be accomplished, are included. (JD)

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Conferencing Makes

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CONFERENCING WITH LEARNERS

Conferencing means teaching! To be a teacher is to teach. To teach effectively you must know the learner, value him, know where he is, where he has been and to supervise his growth. You are in the business of change. To change behaviors effectively means that a time must be found to spend on a one-to-one basis so that focused teaching can happen.

You teach on the run and you conference on the run. Before, during or after school; in the school, on the playground, whenever or wherever you meet you will be conferencing. These may be short responses to questions asked or observations made. The direction or guidance you give may be simply a nod of the head or a pat on the back. You are listening, guiding, teaching with purpose!

Every teacher needs to conference with learners. For the teacher who individualizes instruction, it is a necessity. Planned conferences make it possible to:

- direct purpose
- assess skill or other needs
- give intensive instruction
- guide problem solving thinking processes
- counsel
- cooperatively plan

Realistically you do not just jump into conferencing. First steps must be taken - the very same first steps you systematically take to create an individualized learning environment:

First, plan in light of your "givens":

- organize room (space, materials and supplies)
- establish a record keeping system
- create centers for "sponge" and "choosing" activities
- provide flexible time blocks

Secondly, establish management procedures so the students know:

- where resources (things) are
- what to do with them
- how to use them appropriately
- when they should or can be used
- why they are using them
- how to keep track of themselves (records, etc.)

Third, set guidelines in an "accepting and expecting" atmosphere so learners are:

- learning skills, how to learn
- using problem-solving thinking processes
- learning how to live and work together as a group

Starting with these steps, you will be continually working on them, facilitates "knowing the group" and creates a setting where individualization of instruction can happen.

Knowing the group and learning to work together gives you the opportunity to:

- review
- drill basics that need refreshing, reinforcing
- assess learners
- group learners

Gross grouping is the way you start and finite grouping logically follows. It means that you gradually move learners into groups, prescribing the most nearly appropriate task at this point in time by:

- starting with the total group
- breaking into two, with one or two satellites going
- moving into three, four, and so on
- continuing to "cream off" independent workers

Remember: How many groups depends on you and your "cope - ability" as you manage learners. You are the most important learner!

When learners are learning where things are, they are learning a system -- the mechanics of a system! You recognize that this makes the difference between chaos and order. The guidelines given will help learners to shape appropriate behaviors. In fact:

Never assume that learners know how. Find out!
 Never assume that directions given once or twice take. Make sure!
 Never assume learners can find resources. Be certain!
 Never do for learners what they can do for themselves. Provide opportunities!

Keeping track of learners is an integral part of management mechanics. Records expedite the grouping process -- allow you to group and regroup quickly. Records pinpoint learner needs and alert you to what must be taught. Then you can determine how.

Obviously there are group records you must keep. There is no way out of this. You need the overview. Looking at the concepts/skills to be taught you will see:

- the number of groups possible
- the scope of the groups functioning
- the detail for more finite grouping
- the detail specifics for an individual learner

Learners should be keeping records too. Don't try to keep all the records yourself, even if you are teaching in Kindergarten. Remember, in an individualized learning environment, the learner has the opportunity to keep some of his own records.

One way you can do this is to provide a file folder for each child and have him file it daily into a box or holder. In the folder have the child keep:

- record forms
- work pages
- guided study sheets
- any other currently assigned papers

As quantities of papers mount and units are completed, materials can be deposited wherever you direct. Each day he gets his folder, keeps track of progress made, plans what to do, notes what is done and evaluates what he has done.

Remember: Make this important. The learner learns to be responsible when you give him the opportunity and you teach him responsibility.

This way you can:

- eliminate hours of precious time passing papers in and out
- eliminate repeated direction giving
- eliminate assembling papers for a given student
- bring together products for assessment quickly

It also gives the learners opportunity to:

- practice responsibility
- see where he is and the progress he makes
- plan and evaluate what he does

This folder, student kept, makes conferencing possible. You have planned and organized one way for it to happen!

Some ways to manage conferencing are to:

- list names on chalkboard or chart paper
- use name cards in a pocket chart
- call out list of 4 or 5 students
- have sign-up charts

Once identified, students bring their file folder of records and an independent reading book. They form a small group and read. They are:

- on docket
- ready to conference

As a conference is finished, the child returns to his desk or table and the next child moves to the conferencing chair. A way to block out classroom dissonance is to have the learner conferencing face you with his back to all other learners. You are facing not only the conferencee but all the learners and your radar is working.

Some other ways to manage conferences would be to:

- call one child at a time
- move around from one child to another
- use any small group situation after instruction
- use appointment cards

One reason for conferencing is to look together at the file folder and what is in it. Consider all or some of the following:

- what has been done?
- what was the goal?
- was it accomplished?
- were there any problems?
- what needs to be done next?
- how and when will it be done?
- is the "why" clear? (does the learner know why?)

Together set new goals, make choices and establish time lines.
 Or just talk and listen for student's problems. Give him an opportunity to share with you. Be sure you plan for and organize to conference, make certain there is a time and place where you can see, hear and respond to learner needs and perceptions. This is what makes the difference!

There are guidelines that will help the learner to:

- set his goal
- decide on his plan of action
- make a commitment to his plan
- and later evaluate what he did.

One such guide which provides the structure needed is a commitment sheet. A commitment sheet helps the learner to:

identify his goal by designating:

- what he wants to do
- what he is working toward

plan his action by specifying:

- what activities he will do
- when he will do it

evaluate his performance by noting:

- whether or not the goal was accomplished
- which activities he did or did not do
- whether he had allowed enough time
- how he FELT about what he did and what he accomplished
- what he needs to do next

Samples of commitment sheets are included for ideas. You can design many others. As you recall, variety is the spice of life!

Commitment Sheet for Primary Grades

My name is _____.

The date today is _____.

_____ 1. I will read in _____

_____ 2. I will write _____

_____ 3. I hope I will have time to _____

I will put my work away at _____ o'clock



Did I finish all the work I planned to do?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did I do my work as neatly as I could?

_____ Yes _____ No

I was this kind of worker today:



MY COMMITMENT

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1.	AT		I WILL _____ _____ _____
2.	AT		I WILL _____ _____ _____
3.	AT		I WILL _____ _____ _____
4.	AT		I WILL _____ _____ _____



Commitment Sheet for Intermediate Grades

NAME: _____ DATE _____

Reading 45 minutes daily minimum
 Language 30 minutes daily minimum
 Math 30 minutes daily minimum

For each subject, circle the letter of the one or ones you plan to do. Fill in the blanks as appropriate.

Today's Schedule	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____

1.) How long do you plan to work with reading?

- a. Basal _____
 b. Comprehension Challenges _____
 c. Word Power _____
 d. Classification Teasers _____
 e. Independent Reading _____
 f. Others _____

2.) Spelling

3.) Pupil - Teacher Conference

4. How long do you plan to work on Language today?

- a. Grammar _____
 b. Composition _____
 c. Oral _____
 d. Others _____

5. How long do you plan to work on Math today?

- a. Concept _____
 b. Drill _____
 c. Pretest _____
 d. Post Test _____

6. _____

7. _____

EVALUATION _____

Realistically, how often can you conference with a learner? This will vary. It is possible to conference with a single learner every other week. Just how often it really does happen will depend on the organization and planning you do.

* * * * *

CONFERENCING WITH PARENTS

Conferencing with parents takes place on special days scheduled, when they drop in, at PTA meetings, on the telephone, at home, wherever you happen to meet. This is a time to listen, share, evaluate the learners' general attitude toward school, to relate a school incident, comment on a "special" personality trait, guide thinking about a specific need, or offer some concrete suggestions to help.

It is important in a conference that you have planned and organized to establish that:

- you know the learner
- you value him
- this is what he seems to like, dislike
- these are his strengths and weaknesses
- you want to know parents
- this is a team effort
- this is a child centered room
- a learner focus is the philosophy of the school
- there is specific academic information available

You need to answer specifics about:

- where growth is
- where room to grow remains
- what you are doing about it
- how parents can help

By setting this frame of reference for conferencing you can allay fears relative to grade designations and help parents see that:

- skill/concept mastery is the aim
- you know where learning ditches are
- you are helping learners fill them

For background data use files kept by the children and materials you've recorded. Don't share other children's learning profiles with parents. If you use your group record for specific detail, block off

names. Avoid comparison.

The child's folder of materials is documentation of his work. Share projects, group efforts, etc., which indicate the child's productivity and indicate that his work is valued.

Select where you conference with parents--depending on what you are trying to convey. Neutral ground is reflected when the conference is at a table or the child's desk. In a conference:

- give brief overview of what content is being studied
- have your record and child's folder accessible
- have scope and sequences available
- share them to indicate you know content
- have some books child is reading (texts, readers, etc.)
(this indicates you know where child belongs)
- have notepaper handy, or form prepared to jot down any decisions you make together as a reminder.

Remember: If you promise to do something you need to follow through.

Such a form could show:

- date of conference
- place for special reminders
- current health problems
- future plans, appointments you make together

Suggest ways that parents can help their learner at home such as:

A "being together" time. Enjoy it, Make it short but consistent each night. That way it can be fun!
(Read books, share stories, papers, art, etc.)

A "game" time. Short math drills to practice for accuracy.
(Addition, subtraction facts, multiplication tables)

If parents help in this way they do not have to worry about "how" a concept or skill is being taught at school. They will be reinforcing values and basics that pay off!

Alert parents to the way you will be communicating with them between conferences. Short notes, a form you have devised or a "kind of love note" may be helpful.

Whatever form you decide upon, you can be sure it will be a powerful instrument in building self-concept for the learner, and in keeping parents informed of school happenings especially what their learner is doing. It is a "P.R." instrument that really pays dividends!

Cards or "love notes" that have been used successfully for Primary and Intermediate grades are as follows:

CONTINUOUS REPORTING FORM (Primary)

School Name _____

Date

Dear Mrs. _____

☐ Absence/Tardy	☐ Music	☐ Show & Tell
☐ Art	☐ Playground	☐ Special Activity
☐ Library	☐ Reading	☐ Spelling
☐ Math	☐ Language	☐ _____

Sincerely,

Teacher

*Form for Continuous Reporting (Intermediate)

School Name _____

Date _____

Dear _____

This form is to provide a channel of communication between school and home. It is intended that this will help focus attention on positive progress as well as areas that need improvement.

Name _____

☐ Reading	☐ Spelling	☐ Penmanship
☐ Writing	☐ Math	☐ Neatness
☐ English	☐ Social Studies	☐ Respect for Adults
☐ Listening	☐ Science	☐ Respect for Peers
☐ Speaking	☐ Phys. Ed.	☐ Respect for Property
☐ Critical thinking	☐ Art	☐ Work & Study Habits
☐ Library	☐ Music	☐ Attitude
☐ Special Recognition	☐ Effort	☐ Interests
☐ Talents	☐ Self-Evaluation	☐ Goals
		☐ Personal problem
		☐ Other

Teacher Comment: _____

Student Comment: _____

Parent Comment: _____

Parent Signature _____

*Please reply and return

Notice that because the school name, Dear and some other items are listed, there is minimal time spent in filling it out.

The items listed simply indicate possible areas that you would probably like to comment about. By checking one, you are indicating the area your comment is focused on.

For instance: If ☒ Reading is checked, then the comment might be:

Mary read so beautifully in the reading circle today. Have you noticed how well she is doing now?

OR

If ☒ _____ is checked. You may have written in Independence and Responsibility.

John is setting goals, and reaching them! He finished his assignments today and without being reminded.

☒ Recess

Billy met a "challenge" on the playground today. His plans to solve the problem are _____

☒ Show and Tell

Thank you for letting Mark share the collection of coins with the class. It was a profitable experience for all of us.

☒ Art

Drop in to see Sally's easel picture. It is hanging on display in the hall. You will be as proud of her as I am!

This is a good way of keeping parents informed of what is going on in school. It helps the parent to:

- see the scope of the program
- pinpoint a special event
- solve a problem before it gets too big
- see the nature of a problem when it happens and what is done about it

- keep up-to-date
- know that you are teaching diagnostically
- know that you are helping their child to become a knowing, responsible individual
- know that there is guided structure for him to become independent

Between the scheduled conferences with parents, the on-going continuous report card, (love note) and "chance" meetings, they will soon see that you really:

- know and value their child
- know where their child is and needs to go next
- know content (the program) and are teaching diagnostically/ prescriptively

They will know you are providing a structure:

- where there is order and learning can take place
- for individualizing instruction by guiding learners to the most nearly appropriate task
- for learners to become knowing, caring, responsible individuals